



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council

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Town Clerk 860-441-6640
Town Manager
860-441-6630

Mayor James L. Streeter, Councilors Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Paulann H. Sheets, and Harry A. Watson

Monday, March 28, 2011

7:00 PM

Groton Senior Center, Route 117

FYE 2012 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

I. ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Mayor Streeter.

Members Present: Mayor Streeter, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Watson

Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Superintendent of Schools Paul Kadri, RTM members, Board of Education members, Town staff, Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher and Office Assistant Lori Watrous.

II. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Salute to the Flag was led by Rep. Jack Sebastian.

III. INTRODUCTION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

Elected officials introduced themselves at the request of Mayor Streeter.

IV. READING OF PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

The Notice of Public Hearing pursuant to a resolution passed by the Town Council was read by Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher.

V. BUDGET PRESENTATIONS

a. Town Manager

Town Manager Mark Oefinger gave a brief summary of the proposed FYE 2012 budget. His summary was three-fold: (1) a review of the proposed budget, (2) discussion of the Town Operations portion, and (3) the overall budget process. He stated that if a Fund Balance of 7.5% is maintained, the proposed FYE 2012 budget will result in a 3.8% increase over last year.

b. Superintendent of Schools

Superintendent Paul Kadri summarized the proposed Board of Education budget for FYE 2012 through a slide presentation which outlined the education budget highlights and the balance between student success and fiscal sustainability.

VI. OPENING OF PUBLIC HEARING

Mayor Streeter called the FYE 2012 Budget Public Hearing to order at 8:00 p.m.

Ed Ettinger, 174 Cedar Road, Mystic, remarked that the education budget proposes eight new elementary school teachers and large increases in administrative costs and consultant fees. A remedial instruction program, formerly funded by stimulus money, will now be taxpayer funded rather than eliminated. Mr. Ettinger feels that the education budget is the driving factor in the increase in the proposed budget.

Jack Sebastian, 4 East Shore Avenue, requested a 0% increase in property taxes for FY 2012. He stated that the Board of Education budget should be decreased as far as the law will allow to achieve a 0% increase or less. He remarked that it is a waste of taxpayer money to have both

principals and assistant principals in every school. Mr. Sebastian noted that the Town needs to take better care of its buildings. He cited Norwich Free Academy, which is 80 years old and still in use.

Cheryl Hancin, 223 West Thames Street, Norwich, Vice-President of the GMEA Union, stated that GMEA's last contract was extended two years rather than renegotiated, resulting in cost savings to the Town. The Town Manager was contacted by the GMEA President prior to the budget process to discuss a meeting with all unions, but no meeting materialized. Ms. Hancin stated that all Town employees (salaried, union, and non-union) should have the same insurance benefits, co-pays, and premiums to allow cost savings to the Town by reducing administrative oversight costs and creating a larger pool of employees with identical coverage.

Sally Whitney, 52 Division Street, a Town employee, encouraged the Council and RTM not to increase funding to the Mystic & Noank Library. As an avid reader, Ms. Whitney realizes the importance of libraries and noted that the Bill Memorial Library is closed two days a week. She stated that while it is nice to have three libraries in Groton, the public will not suffer if at least one library is open on any given day.

Lurline Gardner, 4 Venetian Street, stated that new schools are an expense that taxpayers simply cannot afford. She remarked that the education budget has increased every year, and she is concerned that sooner or later there will be no other services.

Angie Robinson, 7 Latham Lane, requested that funding be restored to the Mystic & Noank Library, stating that it is an important part of the community.

Robert Maloney, 11 East Shore Avenue, stated that there needs to be parity throughout the Town regarding insurance and retirement benefits.

John Sutherland, 32 Neptune Road, believes that the Town needs to control the Grand Levy. He stated that departments in Town Operations, Education, and the Subdivisions need to be examined to determine what can be eliminated because a 10% increase to the tax rate is not reasonable.

Robert W. Beaulieu, Jr., 250 Elm Street, Noank, Band Director at West Side Middle School, stated that if Phase II is approved, there will be a 0% increase in the education budget for the next two years. He believes that now is the time to go forward with Phase II.

Zell Steever, 81 Main Street, stated that Groton should utilize energy efficiency, conservation grants, and rebates to save money in the community. He encouraged the Council to have one staff person working on these issues to help the Town reduce its energy costs.

Julie Maisch, 60 Colony Road, requested \$3,000 for the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra, stating that most of the attendees are Groton residents. She noted that musicians from the orchestra conduct programs for both the middle and elementary schools.

George Finch, 100 Allen Street, stated that the roof at Fitch Senior High School is still leaking and that the Town is paying for oil and electricity for empty schools. Mr. Finch is outraged that 27 teachers will receive an additional \$15,000 each upon retirement, totaling \$405,000. He stated that it is time to tighten the budget.

John Casey, 65 Pequot Avenue, Mystic, a member of the Mystic & Noank Library Board of Trustees, requested additional funding for the Mystic & Noank Library to allow it to return services to last year's level. He is also a member of the board of Connecticut Legal Services and suggested that its funding request be maintained as it provides services to the poor and senior citizens who cannot afford to pay for legal services. Mr. Casey encouraged the Council to support

the education budget.

Neal Gardner, 111 Mitchell Street, stated that the proposed budget is not acceptable. He remarked that the education budget needs to be reduced and the tax base needs to be broadened as Electric Boat, Pfizer, and the Navy may not be located in Town forever.

Andrew Parrella, 790 Eastern Point Road, believes that the budget is out of control. He stated that 17% merit increases are totally outrageous and wonders how the Town can trust people who have not maintained its existing buildings. Mr. Parrella believes that teachers should be in an environment that supports education, not just mandates. He noted that people cannot pay their mortgages and that it is time to develop long-range budget solutions.

Kevin Trejo, 536 Shennecossett Road, stated that the Board of Education budget is out of control and should be decreased as far as the law will allow to achieve a 0% increase or lower. He noted that 125 new white boards were purchased at a cost of from \$600,000 to \$1 million, and questioned where the money for this purchase came from. Mr. Trejo feels there should be more transparency in the education budget.

Rosanne Kotowski, 24 Ann Avenue, Mystic, urged the Council to get to a 0% increase in the budget. She noted that she does not support additional climate change staffing or taxpayer funding of the symphony.

Fred Conti, 23 Smith Court, Noank, believes that this budget represents a disconnect with the reality of unemployment and under-employment in Groton, no increase in social security, and the continued rise in the cost of energy.

Mike Doyle, 15 Elm Street, Noank, stated that to achieve a 0% increase, the education budget will suffer from program cuts, layoffs, and additional busing. He plans to vote for Phase II because he believes it is a good way to get energy efficient schools.

Pat Sparkman, 52 Sound Breeze Avenue, suggested a Charter revision to enable citizens to vote on the budget.

Mayor Streeter declared the public hearing closed at 8:52 p.m.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn at 8:56 p.m. was made by Mayor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Watson and so voted unanimously.

Attest:

*Betsy Moukawsher, Town Clerk
Clerk of the Council*

Lori Watrous, Office Assistant